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The Oratory of Barbara Castle

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Introduction

Reporting on Tony Blair's speech to the 1999 CBI conference, *Guardian* sketch writer Simon Hoggart (1999) gave a typically snarky description of the speechifying of the then Prime Minister, or as he called him, 'our very own Big Brother':

The Big Brother smiles a lot in a self deprecating kind of way. He uses 'um' and 'well' as a rhetorical device, to convince us he's not reading out a prepared text, but needs to pause to work out exactly what he means. There is a prepared text of course but he adds to it phrases such as 'I really think' and 'you know I really have to tell you' and 'in my view'.

This, Hoggart decided, was more than a peculiar quirk of Blair, but was symbolic of something which went much further:

This is the new oratory. The old politicians told us they were right, and that there was no room for doubt, the new politician is not telling us truths, but selling us himself ... His message is that you should take him on trust; you should believe him because you love him.

Barbara Castle had an oratorical style quite foreign to the 'new oratory'; she was, rather, paradigmatic of the 'old politician' identified by Hoggart. As this chapter's analysis shows, Castle was a politician who believed firmly in arguing her case even in the face of fierce opposition, revelling in the fight and unafraid to state 'hard truths' to her audience, whoever they might be. Indeed, when in later years she took to the public stage to castigate the Blair government over pensions 'her quick wit and uncompromising style' was embraced by the public as 'a refreshing change from the

inoffensive, conciliating manner of the new generation of politicians' (Perkins, 2003, 449).

Drawing upon the classic concepts of *ethos*, *pathos*, *logos* and studying examples from the three arenas of Parliament, Conference and communication with the electorate, this analysis paints a particular picture of Castle. It argues that to understand her oratory it is important to also grasp her personal belief, as the title of her autobiography put it, in 'fighting all the way' (Castle, 1993). This is the figure of 'Battling Barbara' (Martineau, 2011, 238), the Labour Party's most famous and celebrated female orator since its inception and one of its best orators full stop (Perkins, 2003, 33).

'Fiery Redhead'

Reflecting upon the oratory of Aneurin Bevan, Castle described how she had 'often watched in despair as, carried away by the intoxication of his own power over words, he threw away the chance to influence more timid souls and strained the loyalty of his friends' (1997, 36). Castle herself had an undoubted love for her own oratorical skills also, yet, arguably more than Bevan with his predilection to posture at key moments, she recognised that the primary function of oratory was functional. Beyond the rhapsodic, her rhetoric was purposefully aimed to score palpable hits within in the battle of ideas – where words and argument are the only legitimate weapons – through which democratic socialist ends can only be won. Her love of words and her ferocious ability to wield them was inexorably linked to a love of this conflict, to a fidelity to the righteous cause of socialism, and an inherent belief in the power of her own arguments to convince. There was undoubtedly a personal aspect, or more precisely an aspect of personality, at play here – both in her hunger for argument and her argumentative style.

At school the young Barbara performed in plays and was a representative at inter-school compositions in prose and poetry recitals. Used to arguments with her politically active father and his friends in the ILP, she was normally the only girl to speak in her sixth-form class debates, finding the contributions of the other girls – when they did contribute – frustratingly amateurish (Martineau, 2011, 7, 15). These early experiences with thespian and deliberative performance imparted valuable training in diction and projection and ‘a natural flair for the dramatic’ which would be vital to Castle as she ‘learnt to hold and entice a sceptical, indifferent or barracking audience the hard way, on the street corners of the north’ (Perkins, 2003, 73, 33).

At the heart of her oratory, however, was a sense of personal passion. This passion was well echoed in her portrayal by Miranda Richardson in the film *Made in Dagenham* which tells the story of the 1968 Ford sewing machinists strike and the battle for equal pay. In one memorable scene Richardson, as Castle, delivers the following speech to her incompetent civil servants in the Ministry of Labour:

I am what is known as a fiery redhead. Now, I hate to make this a matter of appearance and go all womanly on you, but there you have it, and me standing up like this is in fact just that redheaded fieriness leaping to the fore. *Credence?* I will give *credence* to their cause? *MY GOD! Their cause already has credence!* It is *equal pay*, equal pay is *common justice* and if you two weren’t such a pair of egotistical, chauvinistic, bigoted dunderheads you would realise that!ⁱ

The trope of the ‘fiery redhead’, as invoked here, is a classic conventions in screen writing, described by the wiki *TV Tropes* thus:

A Fiery Redhead is a red-haired character who is strong, passionate, outgoing, usually outspoken, and almost always female. She has a big personality and she's not afraid to use it. Whatever you do, don't get on her bad side, or there will be hell to pay.ⁱⁱ

Undoubtedly worn though such a stock portrayal may be, by the logic of filmic verisimilitude, such scripting only works if the audience perceives a general truth within it. Certainly Richardson's ferocious performance fits the auburn-haired Castle of public imagination, the woman for whom '[t]here was scarcely an article written that did not portray her as a fiery redhead, or the red-haired conscience of the Labour Party; Red Barbara, like Red Ellen before her, red in hair and spirit' (Martineau, 2011, 123). She has, to this effect, been called 'the scarlet termagant' (*ibid*, 350) and 'Labour's Red Queen' (Perkins, 2003); the *Shropshire Star*, called her a 'Tigress with red hair' (6 Sept 1966, quoted in Martineau, 2011, 181), while amongst her compatriots, Dick Crossman bestowed upon her the title of the Labour Movement's 'redhead' (Crossman, 1969, 483).

If Castle was, indeed, red in spirit as well as barnet this was not due simply to her socialism (which was, to the end, of a particularly red hue) but to a passionate temperament alluded to above. She is described, thus, at the height of her power, as a woman of remarkable energy who 'liked the volume at full blast', 'liked engagement' and 'came at everything with gusto'; as someone who 'roared ... hummed ... bristled with intensity' and was 'lustily ravenous for life, operating at her best at this high voltage and in the starring role' (Martineau, 2011, 131). By her own description she 'always admired passion in politics' (Castle, 1993, 192), a passion linked to a political 'love of combat': 'Barbara revelled in confrontation' states David Owen (1992, 237) who worked under Castle at the Ministry of Health; 'When it came, her adrenalin pumped round and she saw everything in terms of a battle that had to be won.' Described as

liking ‘the razor’s edge’, hers was a personal style which tied to a ‘conviction of her own worth as an equal to men’ made her ‘the feared Amazon incarnate’ (Martineau, 2011, 15-16) who would – so Ian Mikardo (1988, 189) related – throw ‘clanging barrages of Amazonian bellicosity’ at any who stood against her.

The ‘Amazonian’ portrayal was there too in Michael Foot’s mock description of Castle’s self-portrayal in her diaries as ‘sometimes as [that of] Joan of Arc facing (and confounding) her inquisitors, sometimes almost as a new Queen Elizabeth at Tilbury,ⁱⁱⁱ rousing the troops and her country-men as no one else could do’ (Foot, 1986, 47). Foot’s choice of two red-headed female leaders in circumstances of conflict to describe his close friend was clearly deliberate: It also provides the perfect figurative embodiment(s) of that linkage between the personal and the political – between ‘Red Barbara’ and ‘Battling Barbara’ – which is so vital to understand Castle’s oratorical style. For Castle, a personal passion for democratic socialist politics was aligned to a love of combat and a belief, both in her own ability and self-worth as a woman amongst men, and in the power of her arguments to rally and convince.

Follicly based as they so often were,^{iv} with each description of these sorts her position as a high profile strong, forthright woman in a political world still dominated by men was arguably reinforced. This was a clearly frightening prospect for many of the latter and the repetitive reliance upon the ‘red-headed’ depiction should not be necessarily treated as a sign of admiration by those who conveyed it upon her: As Sarah Childs (2008, 141) describes, one of the ‘five lurid shades’^v by which women politicians are symbolically represented in a gendered fashion is the ‘terrifying termagant’ (‘but don’t you just love a flame-haired hand-bagging?’) a portrayal she explicitly linked to that of Barbara Castle and Margaret Thatcher. The role of gender is

key to understanding Castle's oratory and is discussed in detail below. At this point, however, the trope of the 'fiery redhead' is important to note simply in so far as it spoke to a genuine facet of Castle's personality, being indicative of the structuring girders which underlay her oratorical style and provided the basis of her favourite guiding maxim that in politics, 'guts is all' (see Owen, 1992, 240).

'Rabble Rouser'

It is understandable, recognising the above, that appeals to *pathos* were fundamental to Castle's rhetoric, whether speaking to the party, the public or in the Houses of Parliament. At heart Castle was a platform speaker who, in the early phase of her political career, regularly toured the country talking publically: whether partnering with Michael Foot in the 1930s with *Socialist Leaguer* – where together 'they would regale the downtrodden crowd with socialist possibilities' (Martineau, 2011, 36) – or as part of the *Tribune* 'Brains Trusts' public meetings in the 1950s – where, as part of a panel with fellow Bevanites such as Crossman, Harold Wilson, Jennie Lee and Nye himself, she would battle it out in front of overflowing halls (*ibid*, 108). It was through such encounters, being forced to think on her feet in the midst of argument and tailor her rhetoric to win over the crowd, that she honed the oratorical skills which underlay her particular brand of 'rabble rousing speeches' with which she would come to delight party members and supporters (Assinder, 2002).

Added to this was her stage presence, of which she was greatly aware. As Martineau (2011, 33-4) describes:

She had, and continued to have in old age, a big voice on stage, a boombox voice, rich, resonant, seemingly coming out of all sides of her, much bigger than her diminutive stature might suggest and very different from her ordinary speaking voice, which some

people found grating, even shrill. And she had the X factors, star quality, charisma; the sheer force of her personality filled the stage. The words gushed out of her, wave upon wave ... Barbara could feel an audience, massage it, manipulate it, cajole it.

She was indeed, as Paul Foot described, 'a tremendously inspiring speaker' who could address an audience with wit, passion and irony (*ibid*). As late as 1992 Castle was providing rousing speeches when, during the general election of that year her job was, as she described it:

to wind up the proceedings with a clarion call to the faithful sitting in the ticket-only audience. I enjoyed myself, making the same punchy hard-hitting speech I would have made to a street-corner meeting in Blackburn in my earlier days. The audience rose to it, delighted to hear something unconstrained. (Castle, 1993, 584)

Part of this presence was physical. Though small in size and speaking amid pouring rain, footage from the 85th Durham Miner's Gala in 1968 shows Castle addressing her audience forcefully, her left hand held up in front of herself, balled in a fist, as with each point made she jabbed it forwards sharply in emphasis, as if to hammer home each of her points (see BBC, 1969): "You are not the ones who theorise about the need for change in Britain' she told the crowd in a piercing voice: 'You are the ones who have to experience it. Because comrades, Britain must adapt herself, in the age of industrial change ... By definition the Labour party *is* the party of fundamental change'.

Rhetorically, she often articulated a partisan, righteous anger. For example, speaking publically in 1966 at Sunderland Town Hall, she colourfully lamented the fact of the previous Conservative administration, since 'If only we had had a Labour Government in those 13 wasted years, we shouldn't be faced with the appalling

congestion and casualties on our roads, and the traffic chaos in our towns we have today'. The previous Minister of Transport, she attacked, for preferring 'the arid dogma of competition between road and rail which destroyed all hope of co-ordination, robbed the railways of some of their most lucrative traffic, pushed up their deficit and cumbered our roads with freight which ought to have gone by rail' (Castle, 1966a). 'Wasted', 'appalling', 'chaos', 'arid', 'destroyed', 'robbed', 'cumbered' – Castle was the queen of emotionally-charged rhetoric and examples of rallying *pathos* are not hard to find in her public speeches.

Indeed, perhaps her most famous quotation – and oddly her only oratorical example in the *Dictionary of Labour Quotations* (Thomson, 1999)^{vi} – was emblematic of this. At the 1943 Party Conference, the then 32 year old Barbara Betts took to the platform to defend the importance of the implementation of the Beveridge report. There, drawing upon Lewis Carroll, she ascribed to the right-wing secretary of the TGWU Arthur Deakin, the role of the White Queen who offers Alice 'jam tomorrow and jam yesterday':

We of the rank and file ... say to the Trade Union Movement that this Beveridge issue is as axiomatic to us as the Trade Disputes Act is to them.... jam yesterday, jam tomorrow, but never jam today – that is what the government is trying to say to the people, but we want jam today! (quoted in Perkins, 2003, 72)

This sound-bite put her on the front page of *the Daily Mirror*, the most popular paper in the country. She was 'a seductive platform orator – one of the darlings of the party conference' (Marquand, 2008, 212) and it was passionate oratory of this kind, wedded to her solid left-wing politics, which meant Castle quickly became the darling of the grassroots on the NEC. Indeed much of her stature within the Movement came from her

oratory on the conference platform, most notably her 1959 chairman's address to the Labour Party conference.

Case Study: The 1959 Conference

The 1959 speech was perhaps the most powerful single oration of Barbara Castle's career. She opened strongly, telling the assembled membership: 'Last year we met in the bright hope of victory. This year we meet in the shadow of electoral defeat' and that the conference was therefore, 'in the real sense of that much abused word, an 'historic' conference, for the lessons we learn from our defeat may well decide the future of social democracy, not only in this country, but the whole world' (Castle, 1959, 83). Her speech was an intervention in the fullest sense of the term, in the debate to decide what exactly those lessons would be. Castle therefore, through a combination of *ethos*, *pathos* and *logos*, attacked the policy of the Gaitskellite 'Radicals' – as she framed it – 'to abandon the attempt to take over any more industries and to use public ownership merely to ensure that the community gets a cut of the capitalist cake'. She did so on the grounds that 'it would lead us slap-bang into fallacy. That fallacy is the belief that you can separate moral issues from economic ones' (*ibid*, 84).

She castigated, in emotive language, a contemporary British society where '[t]he highest virtue lies in looking after No. 1 and the greatest merit is being strong enough to do it', where '[e]conomic might has become social right and the Devil has taken the communal interest' (*ibid*, 85). In these circumstances it was, she stated, 'chasing fantasies to imagine that we can win elections on moral issues in a democracy built on such amoral [economic] foundations' since '[a]s long as our economy depends on large accumulations of private capital, it *needs* inequality to make it work. This is the only way

it can be financed and no amount of tinkering with taxation can alter it; indeed, if it did, the system would break down!' (*ibid*)

By attacking the *logos* of the Gaikskellite argument, not only on economic rationale but moral also, Castle launched a withering attack also upon their *ethos* as social reformers, summed up in her conclusion that 'Radicalism without socialism is an also-ran', noting that, after all, '[i]n a materialist society, the Tories can always beat us in an appeal to selfishness' (*ibid*). Her answer, by contrast, was an emphatically socialist policy program based upon extending public ownership; it was up the party to 'convince the people of this country that they – and not a few private interests – should control their economic lives' or else they would 'shrink into an impotent appendage of the windfall state' (*ibid*) – a phallic metaphor aimed at opponents' *ethos* as men (and they were almost entirely men) of strong character. In contrast to such impotence, she projected the vitality of public ownership: 'No, comrades' she told them, 'it simply won't wash to say that nationalisation is fusty and out-of-date' when in actuality '[w]e can no more win the battle of nuclear power, electronics and automation on the principles of *laissez-faire* than we could have won the last war on the same principles. Nor can we win the battle against world poverty of the fight for peace' (*ibid*, 86). Here again was evidence of *pathos* tied to *logos*, as Castle's noted love of conflict found material expression in her rhetoric, founded upon metaphors of combat and analogies with war.

All of this came to a head in the closing section of her speech when, having laid out the case against the Gaikskellites and for public ownership, she asked the conference:

Do we believe that our moral aims can only be achieved by economic means? Are we prepared to affirm therefore that what Nye has called 'the commanding heights of the economy' must be publicly financed and under public control? And if so, do we agree that

public ownership, either of whole industries or of key parts of them, is the most direct and effective way to bring this about? Do we believe that publicly owned industries should be answerable to the public through Parliament? Let us get these basic points clear. (*ibid*)

This was an argument of *logos*, expressed in technical terms through an effective linking of *anaphora* to *psyma*, and helped by its linkage to Bevan's *ethos*. By repeatedly confronting members with the question 'do we believe'/'do we agree', and presenting the question, each time, as essentially rhetorical as far as Labour's ideological ends were concerned, Castle sought to interpellate her audience, framing her position as the strongest from the Movement's perspective (see Althusser, 2008). She sought to reinforce this interpretation with the declaration, steeped in *pathos* and appeals to socialist *ethos*, that if Labour members had 'the courage and vigour of mind to do so', then they could 'come out of this defeat clearer in vision and stronger in purpose than ever before'. Returning to the rhetoric of conflict, she announced that Labour had 'won the first phase of our historical battle', telling members they must 'equip ourselves now for the second phase' by adopting her proposed policy approach, naturally – an act which would 'demand of us the highest qualities of mind and spirit' (*ibid*).

As shown, in these few sentences – 'her voice breaking with emotion' (Hunter, 1959, 135) – Castle called upon a rhetoric making appeals of *logos*, *pathos* and *ethos* to rally the Labour Movement to magisterial effect. Crossman would describe it as 'the most powerful speech of the conference' which 'stole the show' and Bevan as 'the best chairman's speech I heard' (quoted in Perkins, 2003, 164-5). The *Sunday Dispatch* described it as 'an immensely powerful speech' claiming Castle carried a 'fearsome array of six-shooters' and that '[n]ot another woman in politics wields even a sharp

hatpin by comparison' (quoted in Matineau, 2011, 148). She herself called it 'one of the major successes of my career' (Castle, 1993, 317).

'Making Socialists'

Oddly though, for all such successes, Castle was seemingly never truly confident as a speaker at conference. Describing her speech at the 1967 conference almost a decade later, Castle (1990, 151) would thus write of how she 'got myself pretty keyed up' about it before hand and sitting down afterwards 'thought it just adequate and was surprised at the applause'. Later she deemed this now half-forgotten speech on transport to have been 'a better speech than I have ever done at conference before' and her 'great breakthrough, conference-wise' at which she was 'immensely relieved'. Her audience would no doubt have been surprised to hear this. As late as 1974 Castle would write of how her speech at conference 'was received politely but tepidly', mulling that 'I am nonplussed by my continuing failure to get over in conference' and wondering if '[p]erhaps it is the blasted mikes are too high for me. Whatever the reason, I left conference feeling depressed' (*ibid*, 528). In 1975, again, she '[a]s usual ... tensed up in quite an absurd way' before speaking: 'No one will ever believe', she wrote, 'that all my life I have been cursed with this lack of self-confidence, which only disappears in certain circumstances and before certain audiences' (*ibid*, 653).

Issues of self-confidence no doubt increased with her transition from back bench rabble-rouser to First Minister of Her Majesty's Government under Wilson. Castle's personal standing was, as discussed, closely tied to her position as a left-wing firebrand and role as self-defined conscience of the party (as played to in the 1959 example). The danger in entering government was that she would find herself unable to call upon the *pathos* and *ethos* which flowed from this position as the complexities of governing and

enforced conformity of collective cabinet responsibility led to political, ideological and even rhetorical compromises. Clearly aware of this Castle made sure to emphasise her left-wing pedigree when the occasion allowed'. Such was the case when, speaking as a Minister at the 1966 Labour Conference, she opened her address with a quotation: 'Economic planning in a democratic socialist economy cannot operate successfully if wage-fixing is left either to the arbitrary decision of a wage-stop or to the accidents of uncoordinated sectional bargaining'. As she subsequently explained to her audience:

This sentence was not written 16 days ago but sixteen years ago by a group of left-wing Members of Parliament who outlined in a pamphlet *Keep Left* their remedy for the same sort of economic crisis which plagued Britain then as plagues us now. The members of that group – Dick Crossman, Ian Mikardo and myself among others – had no doubt then that in a planned society incomes must be planned along with everything else. (Castle, 1966b)

Minister though she may be – so her message went – she had been of the left then and was of the left now, *and furthermore*, her arguments were right then and were right now also. The latter was an important part of the *ethos* Castle articulated, much of her rhetoric being based around a belief in her ability to convince, or rather educate, those who may, before hearing her argument, disagree with the position she advocated: "We must start ... by getting our facts straight" she declared to one audience of public sector workers, as "[w]e shall never solve these problems by the wrong analysis..." (Castle, 1974). The correct analysis, in each case, was that which she would subsequently provide the listener with.

This rhetorical attribute was there, clearly, in her 1959 Chairman's speech discussed above. Therein, Castle she told her assembled comrades that Labour 'got

elected in 1945 because people had learned the lessons of the 1930s', the lessons 'that it took us so long to teach ... that social crimes are also economic ones', and would 'only be elected next time when we have taught people the lessons of the new age in which we now live' (Castle, 1959, 84). Rare today are politicians who would declare the electorate need to be taught, not listened to and learnt from, ascribing to themselves, rather, the *ethos* of the educator. Such was the case with Castle for whom, as Perkins (2003, 162) put it, '[i]f people rejected socialism, the answer was not less socialism, but more education.' Or, in her own words from the 1959 speech: 'Socialism cannot be won on the second-rate! Let us begin this weekend to educate ourselves in what it will ask of us. And then let us go out and make Socialists' (Castle, 1959, 86). This is not a phrase easily imagined from a contemporary Labour leader.

The rhetoric of education was there too when, giving a rallying speech to Labour Party Officers in 1975, she chose to educate them on the importance of tackling inflation. 'There is no chapter in *Das Kapital* on inflation' she told her audience, 'for one reason only – because when Karl Marx was writing inflation was not an issue. Quite the reverse' (Castle, 1975). This stated, she asked them:

do you think if Marx was alive today, sweating his brow for years in the bowels of the British Museum, he would have ignored the overwhelming evidence that on any analysis inflation is one of the single most desperate threats to the future of socialism in this country? Of course he would not. Do you think he would have deluded himself, or his followers into believing it possible for the people of this country as a whole to pay ourselves more than we earn, and still maintain employment and public expenditure at a high level?

Her answer, again, was a clear 'no', deploying the classic rhetorical tools of *psyma* and *anthypophora*, posing multiple rhetorical questions, answered immediately, to explain why alternatives were in her words 'not possible' and 'nonsense'. She concluded with the command that – her argument made – it was 'now the duty and special responsibility of every one of us within this movement to explain to our comrades the choice which we face' (*ibid*). Castle having taught *them* (and corrected an oversight by Marx), their role was thus to now go forth and pass that teaching on to others^{vii} Or as she put it in a speech as Secretary of State for Employment and Productivity to the Industrial Society Conference: 'My job is to tell you how and in what context we can create the political will for the change in attitudes that is so necessary' (Castle, 1968a). The emphasis here again was upon Castle's explanation and the subsequent creation and change which should follow – whether speaking to party members or communicating with electors Castle rhetorical style remained the same.

'No Feminist'

Such examples exhibit a desire on Castle's part to demonstrate to her audience her own learning and in so doing, to demonstrate also that hers were opinions worthy of being taken seriously and not to be dismissed. As one of the few high profile female MPs during her Parliamentary career, such a need to demonstrate and assert the value of her utterances was especially important. This was particularly the case in the face of the collective House of Commons, still a bastion of institutionalised sexism today, but far worse during Castle's period as an MP (see Lovenduski, 2005, 53-56). The emphasis upon her own ability was, in this sense, undoubtedly an appeal to *ethos* (linked to *logos*) as a worthy Parliamentarian.

Unsurprisingly, however, such displays were themselves turned against Castle by critics (even ostensibly friendly ones) through the invocation of the old misogynistic trope of the 'nanny' often wielded against female politicians (see Childs, *op cit.*). This trope was easily married with that of the 'fiery redhead', already discussed, to portray her speaking style as that of the finger-wagging, hectoring 'schoolmistress' telling off the 'boys'. A perfect example of such a portrayal is found in Dick Crossman's description of Castle's winding-up speech in the debate, on the 3rd of July 1969, over the settlement with the TUC regarding the *In Place of Strife* white paper:

I arrived just as Barbara was getting up to boos and cheers and for the first seven minutes she was on her feet, she only got out half a dozen sentences. I was sitting right at the end below the Speaker's chair and I saw her trembling as she got up, nervous, tense and tiny and somehow pathetic. If you are little and can only just see over the top of the dispatch box, if you have a high-pitched woman's voice and if you are trying to still the post-prandial, alcoholic clouds of noise you are at a terrible disadvantage, especially if you are a bit schoolmistressy and try to hector and lecture them at the same time. (quoted in Perkins, 326)

Castle's own view of the speech was itself lacking in confidence, writing in her diary: 'I can't make up my mind whether my winding-up speech ... was a triumph or disaster ... Certainly it was the roughest ride anyone could have' (Castle, 1990, 350). Ultimately, despite Castle's belief in her justness and own self-ability to convince, when faced with insurmountable obstacles such as the opposition, in this case, to *In Place of Strife*, even she recognised that her powers of oratory could only get her so far (which was not to say, of course, any admission that she was not absolutely in the right).

Speaking in the House of Commons was generally 'a nerve-racking ordeal' for Castle (Marquand, 2008, 212) and the aforementioned sexist atmosphere within the

chamber was one issue which had to be dealt with. As she herself described: 'I think the men still think of us as women [when we speak] and you'll hear uncomplimentary remarks under their breath from both sides of the house which are because one is a woman' (BBC, 1972). Faced with comments from a Conservative politician, for example, which asked how her arguments matched those of her husband (at this point a Labour peer) she was withering in her response, denouncing his character:

My husband knows my view, and only the most major male chauvinist would try to involve me, in my arguments about the Common Market, with my husband's attitude ... the hon. Gentleman is living in the Victorian age when he tries to drag that one into this argument. (HC Deb February 16 1978: Hansard vol. 944 cc683-761: 703)

Castle herself had, from early on in her political career declared that she did not want to be seen as a *female* politician: In the 1945 general election, as one of only 87 women candidates out of almost 1,700, speaking to 'a packed, smoke-filled, almost entirely male hall' in Blackburn she had called upon the crowd not to judge her by her gender – 'I'm no feminist. Judge me as a socialist' (Kynaston, 2007, 66) – and from the very moment she started in public life, she consciously avoided the 'traditional' women's fields for fear of being so defined (BBC, 1972). Clearly this was an issue of *ethos* for her and the notion that she would use her sexuality to her advantage was one which she would explicitly deny:

'I have never consciously exploited the fact that I am a woman. I wouldn't dare try that even if I knew how to. I have too much respect for my male colleagues to think they would be particularly impressed.' (quoted in Phillips, 1980, 27)

Reports disagree, however. Martineau (2011, 101) describes how, as Minister for Transport in 1965, Castle, 'with her genius for self-presentation and her ability to

manipulate an audience', would do 'what had worked so well for her in the past with a predominately male and potentially hostile crowd' by 'appl[ying] her femininity with a trowel'. Christopher Tugendhat of the *Financial Times* described this process, thus:

She is a flirt but it wasn't just that she flirted, it was that she liked being the important woman still attractive to younger men who were subordinate. She used her sexuality and rather enjoyed the fact that she was the one with the power'. (*ibid*, 162)

It was not just in terms of sexuality that Castle – who was fastidious in her personal presentation – would allegedly use her gender to her advantage when speaking. Brian Walden describes how, '[w]hen Labour was in opposition, Barbara had a legendary ability to persuade the Speaker that she was a frail, friendless woman who simply had to be called to speak in the debate to make up for the cruel blows of an unheeding world' – where in reality 'she has more guts and vision than any six ordinary men put together ... knows exactly what she wants, and has a carefully thought out plan for getting it' (quoted in Perkins, 2003, 232).

But the manner in which gender relations may structure oratorical styles has another side to it. Discussing institutionalised sexism in British politics, Joni Lovenduski (2005, 54) describes, as an example

the declamatory, adversarial style of Westminster debate that favours rhetoric, speechifying, posturing and arcane practice in the House of Commons rather than cooperation, consensus seeking and real discussion of alternatives. Political practices involving demagoguery, ruthlessness and aggression require qualities that are culturally accepted in men but not women.

Whatever the truthfulness of Lovenduski's gendered attitudinal distinction, Castle's answer to the adversarial (misogynistic) culture of British politics was to embrace it. In

fact, Castle determined that she must, if anything, be *more* adversarial than her male opponents. As she remarked to the BBC (1972):

you have got to be totally indifferent to jibes, or laughter, or criticism. It's no good going along saying, well now don't be unkind to me you're hurting my feelings, you be chivalrous. One of the most flattering things ever said about me by a lobby correspondent writing about the House of Commons was 'she asks no quarter and she gives none'. Now if you see that quality in a woman politician you will find the House respects them even when it disagrees with them.

If the image of the 'terrifying termagant' – or in Castle's case, as reported, the 'scarlet termagant' – is, as Childs says, a trope used to symbolically represent female politicians in a gendered fashion (see above), then nevertheless, both for reasons of personality and political strategy Castle embraced the portrayal of herself as a battling warrior of fiery passion. This was not least the case in the Commons, an arena she evidently viewed in terms of a battleground; as she quipped to the previously mentioned audience at the Industrial Society Conference:

It is appropriate – if rather ironical – that I should be addressing the lunch-time meeting of your one-day conference on Productivity and the Incomes Policy just a couple of hours before *I go into battle* in Standing Committee of the House of Commons on the Prices and Incomes Bill. The prospect of days and night of *bitter political war* concentrates the mind wonderfully about issues which could otherwise become rather theoretical. (Castle, 1968a) [italics added]

So it was that papers such as the then *Manchester Guardian* would described how: 'In attack she provides one of the most awesome sights the House of Commons has to offer' (Martineau, 2011, 124) – and excoriating attacks by Castle are not hard to find,

especially ones upon the *ethos* of her opponents. In a debate in 1971, for instance, she utilised rhetorical *alliteration* to savage the *ethos* of the Government minister:

I regret that the Solicitor-General, who is a man of considerable intelligence, should so debase the level of political dishonesty and debate as to distort the facts, as he has attempted to do and will continue to do so as long as he can get away with it (Hansard C Deb 19 January 1971 vol 809 c951)^{viii}

In another debate she attacked the Opposition for persisting ‘in their rôle as latterday Bourbons, who have forgotten nothing and learned nothing’ (HC Deb June 11 1975 col.893 cc553-61), latching on to the words of one MP as a whip against his entire party:

There was a revealing Freudian lapse in the hon. Member’s remarks when he talked about “3 million votes”. Oh yes, how the Conservative Party loves to capitalise on the more obscurantist elements in our national thinking! That is their one hope of survival. Here they are again appealing to the least far-sighted and forward-looking attitudes.

Such displays of wit and vim were always easier, however, from opposition or the backbenches. As a Minister Castle felt constrained as ‘[s]he disliked writing out speeches, which she thought should be more spontaneous and responsive to the mood of her audience than her officials were prepared to tolerate ... she overprepared, even recording sections of the speech and then listening back to them’ (Perkins, *op cit.*).

Regarding her first speech as Minister of Labour to the House in May 1968 she wrote in her diary that she did not think she had ‘ever been more petrified’ and feeling that she had ‘never in my whole life been worse prepared’, regretting that she had not ‘the time or the energy needed really to refine [her speech] and put it across’ (Castle, 1990, 220).

Barbara Castle’s guiding motto was that ‘guts is all’ and ultimately, she herself was at her best as an orator when speaking from the gut. She was, by her own

description, happiest when, 'free of the responsibilities of leadership', as during her election speeches in 1992, she 'could make daring, mocking sallies against the government' (Castle, 1993, 584). At the root of her the oratorical style was a personal love of argument, of conflict – from which an inherent rhetorical appeal to *pathos* was born - and a belief in its ability to convince and bring change. The embodiment of the political battler for whom argument was all in the fight to achieve her socialist aims, Castle was an insurgent in her speaking pattern – a rebel against the existing order – and as such constrained and at times less effective when speaking from within the restricted position of a government post.

Conclusion: 'Guts is all'

Trained, in speaking, to win and hold the street corners and town halls of the North of England, she developed a particular flair for rabble rousing rhetoric and could dazzle on the public and party platform. Speeches such as her Chairman's address at the 1959 Labour Conference confirmed her position as a great orator and darling of the grassroots, providing rhetorical master classes. Castle's rhetoric, though seeped in the *pathos* of the partisan, was also structured round an inherent self-belief in not just her own arguments but also her argumentative ability. Like the classical rhetoricians, Castle believed in argument as a social good – as the medium through which political ends should and must be won. Her speeches were arguments in the clearest sense of the term – not mere displays of her ability as a wordsmith, but deliberate interventions aimed at convincing others of her own position. They were, as such, frequently grounded in appeals to *logos* (the logic of her argument) and *ethos* (her position as the one arguing the case).

However, despite appearances, she herself never felt truly confident as a speaker at conference or indeed in the chamber of the House of Commons. The subject of Castle's own belief, or otherwise, in her oratorical abilities seems inexorably tied to her status as a female politician in a broadly misogynistic political and social environment. Castle was, by her own declaration 'No Feminist' and would not have wanted to be defined by her womanhood. Yet she recognised and responded to the reality of the culture in her speaking style, using her femininity – even flirting – when advantageous, or, more consistently, by adopting an arguably 'masculine' confrontational stance to 'out-man' the men, allowing the *pathos* of her aggressive style speak to her *ethos* as a worthy political figure.

Thus, while Castle should be recognised in her own right for her clear rhetorical skills and not ghettoised as a 'female orator' or tokenistic add-in to an otherwise all-male discussion, in understanding her oratory her gender is a clear factor. In this, the image of Castle as a 'fiery redhead' – as 'Red Barbara', the 'scarlet termagant' and 'bellicose Amazonian' – is a double-edged sword, denoting both her genuine passion and socialist politics but also marking her out for her rareness (and for the majority of contemporary commentators and comrades, her 'Otherness') as a female politician and Minister within the context of British politics in the post-war period.

[7,598 words inc. endnotes]

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ⁱ See: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UJWni94vAAU>

ⁱⁱ See: <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Main/FieryRedhead>

ⁱⁱⁱ Rather fitting Miranda Richardson, who played Castle in *Made in Dagenham*, also portrayed the tempestuous Queen Elizabeth in *Blackadder II*.

^{iv} On the masculine side, Neil Kinnock was another red-headed orator whose hair colour was often noted and arguably linked to a 'fiery' red-headed temperament (Moon, 2012) – though in his case such references were normally of the negative 'ginger taff' variety. As he himself put it: "Yep, ginger's not good." (Kinnock, quoted in Hattenstone, 2001).

^v These are: 'Not up to it'; 'Nanny – fussy do-gooder, obsessed with trivia' 'Blair Babe – obedient clone, too dim to think for herself'; 'Charming maverick, outspoken loner, lovable but going nowhere'; and 'Terrifying termagant – but don't you love a flame-haired hand-bagging?' (Childs, *op cit.*).

^{vi} It is a demonstrable oversight that all but one of the entries for Barbara Castle in this dictionary are from her diaries, not speeches.

^{vii} This notion was even there in her reliance upon the phrase 'so, you see', to conclude her line of thought: 'So, you see, we aren't just industrial peacemakers and economists down at D.E.P' (Castle, 1968b, 1) and "So, you see, I have a close and abiding interest in Remploy" (Castle, 1970, 2), *etcetera*. Rhetorically, 'so, you see' conveys the simple, logical message that the audience has been shown (by Castle) and thus now sees (that she is correct): they once were blind but now they see...

^{viii} In response, Michael Fidler (Con, Bury and Radcliffe) asked: "On a point of order. I rather thought that the Solicitor-General was being accused of political dishonesty. Is that in order?" The Deputy Chairman (Miss Harvie Anderson), however: "That was not the hearing of the Chair".